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Construction workers needed

Local council wants to build career interest

By Jeremy W. Steele
Lansing State Journal

Rowland Cornish sees the problem firsthand.

By the numbers

\$42,066
average area wage for construction workers

9,280
area construction jobs in 2002

3,200
additional workers needed by 2012

Source: Source: Capital Area Michigan Works

The electrical contractor works with high school students from the Lansing School District, trying to get them interested in the construction industry.

Too often, he said, students - and their parents - view construction as a last resort.

"I've been told by parents, 'Why are you directing my kids toward this?'" Cornish said.

"That's the perception that if you can't do anything else, do construction."

Fixing a shortage of workers, area industry officials plan to tackle that challenge.

"Believe me, there is a career path, and it pays well," said Brindley Byrd, executive director of the fledgling Capital Area Construction Council.

The new council, armed with statistics about wages and job growth, aims to improve training opportunities and increase interest among mid-Michigan young people in construction.

The council is expected to add 3,200 construction workers in Ingham, Eaton, Clinton and Livingston counties from 2002 to 2012, according to Capital Area Michigan Works, which helped start the industry council.

That demand is expected to be for jobs that range from masons to heating and cooling system workers.

Although the unemployment rate in the Lansing area was 5.8 percent in December - the most recent data available - it wouldn't take much of an economic rebound to squeeze the construction labor market, officials said.

"There simply aren't enough construction workers for a boom time, they warned.

"It's really fun when you have a lot of work to do and not many people to do it," said Charles "Chuck" Clark, president of Lansing-based Clark Construction Co. and chair of the council.

"A lot of people whose fathers and grandfathers were carpenters are now insurance salespeople."

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